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# W. Valley coalition may be out millions for freeway widening

**Dennis Godfrey**  
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A commitment by southwest Valley cities to advance money for accelerating the widening of Interstate 10 may leave them holding the bag with limited help from the state.

Goodyear, Avondale and Litchfield Park last spring committed millions of dollars toward speeding up the expansion of I-10 between Loop 101 and Sarival Avenue. The cities made the commitment in anticipation of getting at least part of the money back from the state and federal governments.

The Legislature in June appropriated \$307 million for the Statewide Transportation Acceleration Needs program, known as STAN. However, the Arizona Department of Transportation has made no decision about repaying state funds to the cities.

Chuck Wolf, Avondale's vice mayor, said the three cities and Buckeye were pressed to take action by congressional and legislative leaders.

"They said for us to take the leadership and we will help," Wolf said. "We were told, you go off the cliff and we'll provide the parachute. Now, we're falling off the cliff without a parachute."

Goodyear, Avondale, Litchfield Park and Buckeye, in a deal brokered by Goodyear Mayor Jim Cavanaugh, came up with a plan this year to speed the widening of about eight miles of I-10. The cities, not including Buckeye, agreed to pay the interest on ADOT construction bonds over eight years. That means construction could start by late 2007 rather than 2013.

The construction is expected to cost \$142 million. Most of the money would come from the half-cent sales tax that Maricopa County voters approved in 2004 for transportation.

Under the best scenario for the cities, the cost for them would be about \$12.6 million. That would mean Goodyear would pay \$7.3 million, Avondale would contribute \$4.8 million and Litchfield Park would fork out \$379,000, according to Mario Saldamando, Goodyear management assistant.

Under the worst-case scenario, the cities' costs would double.

The southwest Valley cities anticipated getting money from both the state and the federal governments to pay some or all of their costs.

It looks like the federal help will come.

Jerene Watson, who handles intergovernmental affairs for Goodyear, said she

expects \$2 million to come to the cities from the appropriation bill that must be approved by Congress before the end of the year.

However, state help will be limited.

ADOT said that projects for which money was already committed could not get help from STAN.

In another blow, ADOT said interest payments also were ineligible.

"We kind of got caught on two sides here," said Eric Anderson, transportation director for the Maricopa Association of Governments. "We can't use the STAN money to reimburse those communities for what they are putting into the program. . . . It's not an allowable expense."

Anderson said a number of meetings have been held on the issue, with the result the same: The cities will not be reimbursed by the state for the interest money.

"That caused some hard feelings out there," Anderson said.

The official Goodyear line seems to be focusing on the glass being half-full.

Cavanaugh said the important thing is that the STAN money is providing about \$190 million to Maricopa County, including millions for widening I-10 from Sarival Avenue west to the Verrado development in Buckeye.

But what about help for the accelerated payments the southwest Valley cities are making?

"I didn't expect that," the Goodyear mayor said.

"Would I have liked something like that? Probably. But I really wasn't counting on that."

Watson said the premise that STAN does not do much for the southwest Valley is wrong.

She said a number of West Valley projects are moving ahead because of the state money.

"I think it's a great thing, and I hope that they (legislators) understand that we could use more next year and that there are other worthy projects," she said.

But Watson acknowledged the cities were disappointed that their acceleration was ineligible for reimbursement.

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